

# State of Connecticut

## GENERAL ASSEMBLY



### COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

## CONNECTICUT COMMISSION ON CHILDREN

### Minutes of Meeting Legislative Office Building, Room 2A Hartford, Connecticut

**Tuesday, May 10, 2005  
10:00 a.m. – 12:00 noon**

**Voting members present:** Judith Busch, James Cordier, Mary Fox, Representative Demetrios Giannaros, Senator Christopher Murphy, Josh Piteo, Laura Lee Simon and John Yrchik.

**Ex officio members (or designees) present:** Office of Policy and Management (Anne Foley), Department of Social Services (Sylvia Gafford-Alexander), Department of Correction (Mary Johnson), and Department of Mental Retardation (Commissioner Peter O'Meara).

**Members absent:** Maryann Campbell, Joseph Clary, Department of Education (Associate Commissioner George Coleman), Dr. Alex Geertsma, Department of Public Health (Deputy Commissioner Norma Gyle), Senator Mary Ann Handley, Alison Hilding, Carl Hooper, Department of Children and Families (Debra Korta), Chief Court Administrator (Judge Michael Mack), Representative Michael Lawlor, Attorney General (Susan Pearlman) and Mary Grace Reed.

**Commission staff present:** Elaine Zimmerman, Thomas Brooks, Elizabeth Brown, Patricia Estill, Dawn Homer-Bouthiette, Rachel Levy and Edie Luciano.

**Handouts:** Agenda; Minutes for meetings of September 14, 2004, November 9, 2004, and January 11, 2005, 2005 Legislative Session, Connecticut Early Childhood Partners Strategic Plan.

#### **Meeting Convened**

Chair Judith Busch called the meeting to order at 10:16 a.m.

#### **Approval of Minutes**

John Yrchik moved to approve the minutes of the September 14, 2004 meeting. The motion was seconded by Laura Lee Simon and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Yrchik moved to approve the minutes of the January 11, 2005 meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Simon and was unanimously approved.

Mr. Yrchik moved to approve the minutes of the November 9, 2004 meeting. The motion was seconded by Ms. Simon and was unanimously approved.

### **Nominations Committee Report**

Ms. Busch said that she had appointed a Nominations Committee with Alison Hilding as chair to propose a slate of officer candidates for the June election.

Ms. Busch presented the Nominations Committee's slate of candidates to be voted on at the June meeting of the Commission. The Nominations Committee nominated:

<i>Chair:</i>	<i>James Cordier</i>
<i>Vice Chair:</i>	<i>Attorney Judith Busch</i>
<i>Secretary:</i>	<i>John Yrchik</i>
<i>Treasurer:</i>	<i>Josh Piteo</i>

Ms. Busch called for nominations from the floor. There were no nominations from the floor.

### **Report on Public Education and Information**

Special Projects Director Patricia Estill reported on the Commission's public education and information work. The Commission has received many requests for information on childhood obesity following our February 10 public forum. Ms. Estill observed that health insurance coverage generally does not cover obesity-related treatment. She said that approximately 85% of mothers attending a Mother's Day luncheon in Ansonia were overweight.

Ms. Estill said that the press covered the Commission's May 5 forum on early reading success, as well as the obesity forum. She said that Executive Director Elaine Zimmerman has a monthly segment on WVIT (NBC 30) television's mid-morning news program. Ms. Estill welcomed Commission members to offer input on the Commission's public outreach work.

Ms. Zimmerman said that the NBC affiliate station lets the Commission control the content of the news segments. This shows that the Commission's research is valued. The news appearances result in many phone calls from the public requesting information.

Ms. Busch said, on the topic of childhood obesity, that she found that many low-income parents did not know how to shop for healthy foods. Ms. Zimmerman said that Ms. Estill's work with the Connecticut Department of Public Health (DPH) resulted in the state being ranked first in the nation in childhood immunization. She said that Ms. Estill designed immunization materials for the state's immunization campaign.

**Report by Executive Director**

Ms. Zimmerman said that the early reading success forum with Reid Lyon, President Bush's chief expert on reading, revealed that teachers are not taught how to teach reading and accountability is lacking. Ms. Simon said that forum participants recognized the need for teacher training. She said that Haskins Laboratories are an important partner. Ms. Zimmerman said that 80% of children sent to special education were not taught to read.

Sylvia Gafford-Alexander of the Department of Social Services (DSS) said that many young men who cannot read spend a lot of time in detention, showing that behavior is affected by inability to read. She said that the YMCA has a good adult reading program but there is a two-year waiting list. Ms. Zimmerman said that no group of legislators is taking on this issue, and that we need to identify leaders for the next legislative session.

Ms. Simon praised the film shown by Dr. Lyon at the forum that showed superb reading teachers teaching children in an age-appropriate approach. She said that this film should be used on educational television. Josh Piteo said that the Baltimore, Maryland city council made reading a top priority. They gave remainders of books to children; test scores improved. Mr. Piteo said that the private sector should be asked to be involved. Ms. Zimmerman said that, if okay with the board, staff will pull together a strategic initiative on reading.

Mary Fox said that because ESL/undocumented parents are afraid to be contacted, special outreach efforts are necessary. School Readiness used to have teacher training funds available. Ms. Fox pointed to the problem of uncertified teachers who do not know how to teach reading. She said that community colleges do not want to take the leap but need to do more.

Ms. Zimmerman said that she visited Sánchez Elementary School in Hartford with Dr. Lyon. The school, in a high-crime area, is clean and bright. The children's attention was riveted to one of the best teachers Ms. Zimmerman had ever seen, who taught phonological awareness in a very developmentally appropriate manner. Sánchez teachers, who are Haskins-trained, told the visitors that social-emotional problems, acting out, and special education placements have become less frequent. Ms. Zimmerman observed, however, that the City of Hartford recently got rid of all reading specialists. Representative Demetrios Giannaros said that it is critical for schools to keep up to date with good approaches.

Mr. Yrchik said that education needs to start with quality pre-kindergarten, to support social-emotional growth in addition to cognitive growth. Quality teachers and programs in pre-K are important. The receptivity among school districts has never been better for quality improvement, because federal law has focused attention on this issue.

Ms. Gafford-Alexander asked whether the Reading First grant involved a competitive application. Ms. Zimmerman said that the No Child Left Behind law focused on reading and parental involvement. A state could not receive funding unless it showed how to implement a reading plan based on research-based practices. The Connecticut plan was rejected four times by the federal government, but the state finally received several million dollars for certain high-risk areas. Ms. Zimmerman said that the reading forum with Dr. Lyon helped move state policy.

Ms. Zimmerman said that the Commission is partnering with mayors on children's issues through our work with the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM) and the National League of Cities (NLC). The Commission provides technical assistance and other services to mayors. NLC invited the Commission to make a presentation on parent leadership in Washington, DC.

On school readiness, Ms. Zimmerman said that quality pre-kindergarten is critical but its value is enhanced if linked to home visitation. The Education Committee asked the Commission to bring in a consultant and create a plan for Medicaid-funded home visitation in low-income areas. In the area of youth leadership, the Commission formally partners with the Connecticut Forum. The Commission has also been working on anti-bullying efforts in schools, obesity prevention, and language and framing of prevention issues.

Ms. Simon reported on her progress in raising money for a multi-media public education campaign for prevention among children ages 0-18. She said that the Commission has formed a remarkable collaboration with the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the Committee for Economic Development. Approximately \$250,000 has been promised for the campaign.

#### **Report on Early Childhood Partners**

Legislative Director Elizabeth Brown said that the Commission worked with DPH to create an early childhood strategic plan, Early Childhood Partners, with the support of the State Prevention Council. She said that this is an important step in fulfilling the Commission's goal to build a coordinated system on the local level to bring health-related services, skills and knowledge to parents.

#### **Report on Pending Legislation**

Ms. Brown gave an update on bills before the General Assembly. She said that both the Appropriations Committee and the Governor's budgets provide more dollars for early intervention, family support and Nurturing Families programs. The budgets make a commitment to prevention and early childhood issues, as do the school readiness bills (S.B. 1339 and H.B. 6949).

Ms. Brown said that the child poverty bill is moving through the legislative process. The bill addresses systemic issues and improves efforts to maximize use of the federal Earned Income Credit, which is a goal of the Child Poverty Council. A school nutrition bill (S.B. 1309) would ban soda in schools and create school wellness committees at the local level. NLC will give the Commission and CCM a grant to work on childhood obesity issues. Ms. Brown said that a lot is happening on behavioral health and juvenile justice issues. HUSKY eligibility is still being negotiated. She said that good things are happening on afterschool issues.

Mr. Yrchik said that the school readiness bills contain some significant differences, and he expressed his support for H.B. 6949. Mr. Piteo said that the nutrition bill, S.B. 1309, is an important bill to pass.

Senator Christopher Murphy discussed KidCare and mental health issues. He highlighted two issues, funding and state structure. The Appropriations budget contains significant funding for the rehabilitation option. Goals related to structure include to open up slots, to maximize federal revenue and to introduce more efficient management while moving from a managed care model to a state umbrella approach. Ms. Zimmerman said that there are many children at the children's hospital who need mental health services. Sen. Murphy said the KidCare process is taking some time because the selected administration service organization has a checkered past and details need to be addressed to ensure a successful transition.

Commissioner Peter O'Meara of the Department of Mental Retardation (DMR) said that the budget contains a reallocation of Department of Children and Families dollars to transfer responsibility to DMR for 125 children voluntarily placed with DCF who are DMR clients. The state would also begin to bring 40 children in out-of-state placement back to Connecticut.

Commissioner O'Meara said that DMR is eager to be part of Birth to Three discussions. Many of the Birth to Three successes can be used as program models, including early contact with parents at home and mentoring early on. These strategies help avoid later costs. Ms. Gafford-Alexander said that DSS is involved in Early Childhood Partners and behavioral health work.

Anne Foley of the Office of Policy and Management said that some of the Governor's bills are still moving, including bills for supportive housing for families at risk of homelessness and children aging out of DCF. She said that the proposed nursing home provider tax would send four percent back to providers of services, many of whom also serve children. Ms. Foley said that one of the Governor's proposals, to support postsecondary education assistance for adopted children, was not included in the Appropriations Committee budget.

#### **Board and Staff Appreciation**

Commission members and staff members were honored for their work this year.

#### **Closing**

Ms. Busch closed the meeting at 11:57 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Yrchik". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John Yrchik  
Secretary